

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HONG K 03249 230223Z

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 3249

LIMDIS

NOFORN

EO 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CH, PG, VN, US

SUBJECT: CHIEF NCNA REPORTER IN HONG KONG COMMENTS ON
SINO-US-VIETNAM RELATIONS

1. CHIEF NCNA REPORTER SZETU KEUNG IN A MARCH 21
CONVERSATION OVER LUNCH POINTEDLY TOLD CONGENOFF
THAT "WE ARE CONCERNED" OVER THE APPARENT RAPID PACE
OF THE NORMALIZATION OF US-VIETNAM RELATIONS.
SZETU SAID THAT RUMORS IN HANOI'S DIPLOMATIC
COMMUNITY SUGGESTED THAT US-VIETNAM DIPLOMATIC
RELATIONS WOULD BE ESTABLISHED SOON. HE SAID THAT
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HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY THE US WAS MOVING SO
QUICKLY VIS-A-VIS VIETNAM WHILE SINO-US NORMALIZATION
HAS "NOT REALLY MOVED AHEAD" IN RECENT YEARS.
CONGENOFF REPLIED THAT IN HIS OPINION, THE NORMALI-
ZATION OF US-VIETNAM RELATIONS MIGHT NOT OCCUR AS
QUICKLY AS SOME PRESS REPORTS SUGGESTED. THE
WOODCOCK MISSION WAS THE FIRST STEP BUT MANY

PROBLEMS PROBABLY STILL NEEDED TO BE OVERCOME.
CONGENOFF CITED ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE'S
MARCH 15 STATEMENT BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN
RELATIONS COMMITTEE AS AN INDICATION THAT WE HOPE
SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS CAN ALSO BE UNDERTAKEN ON THE
QUESTION OF SINO-US NORMALIZATION.

2. CONGENOFF THEN RAISED QUESTION OF MARCH 15
"PEOPLE'S DAILY" ARTICLE ON STRENGTHENING THE PLA
NAVY WHICH STATED THAT CHINA INTENDED TO "RECOVER"
THE SPRATLY ISLANDS. CONGENOFF EXPRESSED THE
THOUGHT THAT THIS MAY CAUSE SOME CONSTERNATION IN
HANOI. SZETU STATED THAT THE PRC HAS PUBLICLY AND
PRIVATELY TOLD THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT THAT THE
SPRATLYS AND THE PARACELS BELONG TO CHINA AND THAT
"THIS HAS BEEN CLEAR" AS FAR BACK AS 1952 WHEN
PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI OUTLINED THE CHINESE POSITION.
(COMMENT: WE HAVE NO RECORD OF SUCH A STATEMENT
IN OUR FILES.) CONGENOFF ASKED IF THE CHINESE
GOVERNMENT MIGHT SOMEDAY SHOW FLEXIBILITY ON THIS
QUESTION IF NEGOTIATIONS WERE STARTED WITH THE OTHER
CLAIMANTS TO THE ISLANDS. CONGENOFF CITED THE 1961
COMPROMISE WITH BURMA ON DISPUTED BORDER TERRITORY
AS AN EXAMPLE. SZETU RESPONDED THAT THE FOREIGN
MINISTRY HAS NEVER EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO
COMPROMISE ON THE PARACELS AND THE SPRATLYS, BUT
THIS MIGHT HAPPEN SOMETIME IN THE FUTURE.
BROADENING THE DISCUSSION, SZETU SAID THAT THE PRC
WASN'T OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET INFLUENCE
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IN VIETNAM SINCE THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON "FOR SOME
TIME." AS AN EXAMPLE OF CONTINUING SINO-VIETNAMESE
PROBLEMS, SZETU SAID HE HAD NOTICED THAT ALL THE
FORMER VIETNAMESE AMBASSADORS TO THE PRC HAD BEEN
REMOVED FROM THE RECENTLY ELECTED CENTRAL
COMMITTEE. IN ANY CASE, SZETU ADDED "WE HAVE
FAITH IN THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE."

3. WHEN ASKED ABOUT TENG HSIAO-PING, SZETU SAID
HIS MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES ARE CONFINED TO THE
REPORTING AND ANALYSIS OF EAST ASIAN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS AND SINO-US RELATIONS AND HE DID NOT "PAY
CLOSE ATTENTION" TO SUCH QUESTIONS. HE EXPRESSED
EXASPERATION OVER THE INTENSE FOREIGN INTEREST IN
TENG HSIAO-PING'S RETURN, BUT ADDED THAT "WE
EXPECT HIM TO BE RESTORED TO SOME POSITION SOON,
ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NOT HAD ANY OFFICIAL GUIDANCE ON
THIS QUESTION."
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